



**Archie's Exotic Pet Rescue**

[www.archiesrescue.ca](http://www.archiesrescue.ca)

# Rabbit Communication Sheet

## **A Shudder**

A simple rabbit expression of happiness is the “shudder.” The rabbit will lift its front legs up a bit, and shiver the skin of its chest and back by twisting rapidly. Sometimes its head and ears will twist a little too. A rabbit shudders to tell you that it is happy, hopefully with you and in general. You can think of it as a glad pat on the back for a job well done.

## **Begging**

Rabbits do beg for food and affection, and it's pretty unmistakable. First the rabbit will probably come right up and stare at you expectantly, and maybe nudge you with its nose a few times. An aggressive rabbit may nip you, to make sure it has your attention. Finally, it may put its front paws on your leg and stare dolefully into your eyes. Oh yeah, that's begging alright.

The most common reason rabbits beg is for edible treats

## **Binky**

(Dancing and hopping madly): A sign of pure joy & happiness! The happiest rabbit expression is commonly called a “binky.” It's impossible to mistake for anything else, and the first time you see one you will probably wonder if the poor thing is having a convulsion. When a rabbit binkies, it jumps into the air and twists its head and body in opposite directions (sometimes twice) before falling back to the ground. This can be done while standing in one place, or while running, which is really weird looking, and is sometimes called the “happy bunny dance.” A rabbit can even turn 180o in midair. All this is a rabbit's way of telling you straight out that it is happy and overall pleased with you and its life. Some rabbits binky a lot and some hardly at all, even if they are being treated well. Everyone has their own temperament.

## **Bugged Eyes**

...and is constantly sniffing while making odd noises, he/she is scared. There could be something in the environment that might be threatening him.

When he is feeling uneasy, he often lets his inner eyelids protrude partially, making it more visible and wide. Normally, rabbits do this during vet visits or after trimming their claws.

### **Bumping With Nose**

If your rabbit is bumping its nose into something they find interesting or anything you've been touching, he might be showing or asking for your affection.

### **Bunny Back to You**

If your Bunn turns their back to you, it's like a cold shoulder. However, if they turn to look at you, that means they are willing to forgive you.

### **Butt Twitching**

When you give a rabbit a yummy treat, you might notice that their butt starts to twitch. It could even be twitching so fast that it looks like their butt is vibrating. This means that your rabbit is very happy and enjoying the food you just gave them.

### **Chinning**

Their chin contains scent glands, so they rub their chin on items to indicate that they belong to them. If your bunny rubs its chin on you, don't push them away. Instead, be thankful because they are marking you as their own.

### **Circling**

When a rabbit runs circles around your feet (or run figure eights between your legs), this is a sign of excitement and love. A lot of times the rabbit will be making a cute oinking sound (some people call it honking), while they're at it.

### **Closing Eyes While Being Petted**

Indicates happiness. He/She might be enjoying the moment or you are probably petting in just the right spot.

### **Cold Shoulder**

Some rabbits can really hold a grudge. If you do anything to upset your rabbit, like rearranging their cage or clipping their nails, they might refuse to interact with you for a little while. Usually they will let you know they are disappointed in you by purposefully sitting with their butt facing you and giving you the cold shoulder.

### **Digging**

Rabbits dig because it is a natural and instinctive behavior. Digging is a way for rabbits to have fun and occupy themselves when they are feeling stressed or bored. Many rabbits have also learned that digging is a way they can ask for attention from their human caretakers.



### **Ear Position - Curious**

Bunnies are very curious by nature. As soon as they're comfortable with their nearby environment, they'll start exploring beyond it. An extremely curious rabbit is very easy to recognize, because it's the only time you'll find their ears tilted forward, often with their necks stretched out a bit. Their ears will also be facing forward, of course, to catch every bit of juicy news. Some folks call this forward-tilting ears pose the "baseball cap." You can think of it also as Sherlock Holmes' hat (or Investigator Bunny's).

### **Ear Position - Each Opposite**

Sulking -A more mild signal of unhappiness is having one ear facing backward and one forward, or one ear down and one up. These usually indicate a bunny that is less than happy, but sometimes for only vaguely defined reasons. A little grooming or a treat gift can often turn that frown upside down.

### **Ear Position - Facing Back &Way Back**

When their paws are out in front, their body is flattened, and their ears are flattened, that usually means "That's it! Time for your lesson in pain."

### **Ear Position - Nervous or Frightened**

A nervous or frightened rabbit will face its ears backward and lower them, but with the openings facing sideways rather than back, and often will point its ears a bit out to the side rather than straight back. If you reach for your rabbit and it lowers its head and ears, spreading its ears or tilting both ears to one side rather than keeping them pointed straight back, it is scared. This is usually accompanied with a stance that leaves the rabbit ready to flee, and may include ducking the head. Mild nervousness may be sometimes shown by stance alone. A scared rabbit will not stand aggressively as if it's about to charge you, like an angry one will, although otherwise the signals can be a bit related (as are fear and anger).

### **Ear Position - Serious Sulk**

A more serious sulk is indicated by ears tilted far back, or (even worse) tilted back and facing down, all done while lying facing you (or facing to the side; not directly away from you, which is an outright insult) in a meatloaf position. This is a seriously sad rabbit, and you should take some time to think about what might be wrong. It might even be sick, so check the litterbox for evidence. Note that rabbits often sleep lying with their ears laid back in a fashion very similar to the "sulking" signal and with their eyes narrowed but not closed. They always have particular places they sleep, though, so you probably won't confuse the two.

### **Ear Position - Sideways**

Ears Pointing up or slightly lowered back means: "Watch it, buddy."



## **Ear Position - Up & Backward**

That usually means "You're cruising for a bruising, dude."

## **Ear Twitching**

When both ears of your rabbit are twitching, he is on full alert. He is trying to listen and analyze every sound he hears. On the other hand, if only one ear is up, he is still listening, but is just too lazy to use the other ear. He does this whenever he is resting and is suddenly disrupted by noise.

## **Ears Laid Back**

If he is resting with ears against his back, he might be having a good time. Normally, at this state, his ears are touching one another. In the event that both ears are against his back and are not touching, he is scared.

## **Flicking a Back Leg When Leaving You**

Have you ever noticed when you put your rabbit down after holding them that they flick their feet as they hop away? This means, in very strong language, that they are upset with you. You might see it at other times when your rabbit is upset with you too, like after you trim their nails. And it is often followed by your rabbit giving you the cold shoulder and completely ignoring you for a while.

This is one way rabbits will really show you their personality. Some will come right back and forgive you as soon as they hear the sound of a treat. Others will wait for you to come and give them a massage.

## **Flopping**

A rabbit flop can actually look a little scary for new rabbit owners, but it doesn't have to be. Flopping is when rabbits throw themselves onto their side and sleep. Sometimes they even roll all the way onto their back.

This is actually really adorable, and it's a sign that the rabbit feels completely safe. But it can be startling if you're not used to it, because it kind of looks like the rabbit is dead. But if you watch them closely, you'll see your rabbit is breathing.

If you're a new rabbit owner and you see your rabbit laying on their side like this, don't worry! This is a sign your rabbit trusts you completely

## **Gentle Nudge**

Sometimes your rabbit will softly nudge your hand while putting her head down. This means that your rabbit wants you to pet her. Sometimes the rabbit will nudge your arm or your leg instead, but if she's putting her head down then a massage is in order.



Rabbits absolutely love to be pet, especially on their forehead and behind their ears (but not under their chin, like cats do). You can also massage them all along their back, and watch how they melt into the ground. Petting your rabbit is an excellent way to convince them to trust you.

### **Grunts/Growls**

Usually angry, watch out or you could get bit!

### **HUNCHED POSITION!**

This one is very serious. A hunched rabbit is similar to a loaf, but your rabbit will look very uncomfortable. They will be up on their front paws a little bit to try to avoid pressing their belly into the ground. Their eyes might also be squinted, rather than the typical wide bunny eyes. If you see your rabbit in a hunched position, it will look like they want to settle down into a loaf but don't want to put pressure against their stomach.

If you ever notice your rabbit sitting like this, it means there is likely something wrong with their digestive tract. You will want to watch your rabbit very closely and check to make sure they are eating and pooping. If their behavior doesn't change, then you'll want to take your rabbit to the vet right away. There's a good chance they might be experiencing GI stasis and require medical attention.

### **Hard Nudge**

If your rabbit gives you a very hard nudge with their nose, this is your rabbit telling you to get out of the way. Usually, your rabbit wants to go someplace past you, and you're blocking the way.

Some rabbits will give you a hard nudge and wait patiently for you to move. If you don't they'll try to find another way around. These are the polite rabbits. Most bunnies will give you a hard nudge, and if you don't move right away, they'll try to force their way through. Sometimes they'll even give you a little nip to encourage you to move faster (rude!).

### **Head Flick (Half Binky)**

A common variation, which you can easily do too, is the half-binky, also called a head flick or ear flick. Instead of twisting the whole body, just the head is quickly turned sideways and back. This is still a pretty impressive sight in a creature with ears longer than its head! A head flick can be performed while running, or when sitting in place. A head flick is similar in meaning to a shudder, but is a little more playful and silly.

### **Laying Flat On The Ground**

With legs spread out to the side or behind – Relaxation, bliss



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### **Licking You**

To show that you mean a lot to your rabbits, they often groom you by licking. They rarely do this so think of it as a blessing. Then again, there are times when they will lick you unexpectedly. There might be an interesting taste in your hands.

### **Nipping**

Believe it or not, nipping is not usually an aggressive behavior. Nips are not hard bites. They are just little pinches your rabbit will give you with their teeth. They usually don't hurt much, but your rabbit could inadvertently get you in a more tender spot. If a rabbit gives you a little nip, they might even be trying to help you out and groom you. Most often, though, a rabbit will give you a little nip to either get your attention or tell you to move out of the way.

### **Periscoping - Stand On Hind Legs**

Curious rabbits sometimes will rear up onto their hind limbs and stand tall to look around, which is called "periscoping." Unfortunately, they are rather bottom-heavy creatures and have a tendency to tumble over backwards when doing so. Just try not to laugh.

### **Playing**

Rabbits like to push or toss objects around. They may also race madly around the house, jump on and off of the couch and act like a kid that's had too much sugar.

### **Shrill Scream**

Extreme pain or fear.

### **Sniffing**

May be annoyed or just talking to you. Some unsprayed females sniff loudly when being handled.

### **Spraying**

Males that are not neutered will mark female rabbits in this manner as well as their territory. Un-sprayed females will also spray.



### **Throwing/Tossing**

Rabbits like to throw toys around. They throw their toys around often when they are playing. They'll take the toy in their mouth and lift their head to throw the toy to the side. Then they'll go get the toy and do it again.

Sometimes rabbits will also throw things around when they're a little frustrated or bored. For example, if they are kept in an enclosure that's too small, they might resort to throwing their food and water bowls around (some rabbits will do this even if they have plenty of space).

### **Thumping**

Rabbits often are displeased when you rearrange their stuff. They are creatures of habit and when they get things just right, they like them to remain that way, and may thump in anger, frightened, mad or trying to tell you that there's danger (in his opinion).

### **Tooth Chattering**

Loud grinding or chattering can indicate pain.

### **Tooth Grinding**

Indicates contentment, like a cat's purr.

### **Upside Down, Legs in Air**

Your rabbit will only do this when in total bliss, and often after a big bout of binkyng.

### **Wants a Nose Rub - Or Grooming**

A rabbit will present itself for grooming by coming right up next to you, maybe nudging you a bit with its nose or poking its nose under your hand or foot, then lowering its chin and chest to the ground, and stretching its head forward while keeping its rear up a bit. While the ears may get laid back a little, this is quite different from the signal for fear (in which the head is never stretched forward) or anger (which is almost always indicated while standing).

This is not generally a request for grooming; most often it is more like an order. Disobeying this order can lead to unhappiness, chewing on your clothing, or even an annoyed nip. Repeatedly ignoring a rabbit's invitation for grooming will lead to insult and frustration, which can in turn result in having your rugs shredded, your baseboards removed, and your pillow peed upon. It's way easier to provide at least a few strokes on the forehead upon request to support your rabbit's self-esteem.



**Yawning**

Yawning is often associated with sleepiness, tiredness, or laziness. Whether you believe it or not, the same goes with rabbits. If your pet bunny opens his/her mouth wide to the point that teeth are exposed, don't fret. It doesn't mean they're being aggressive. They are only yawning.

**Zooming**

Speedily running around; can include Binkies

